

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

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AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL NICE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L BORDEAUX 0039

BRUSSELS FOR USNATO

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, FR

SUBJECT: PROSPECTS OF THE LEFT COMING TO POWER IN FRANCE

JACQUES CHABAN-DELMAS' ASSESSMENT

SUMMARY: FORMER PRIME MINISTER JACQUES CHABAN-DELMAS'S ASSESSMENT IS THAT ALTHOUGH THE TREND IS NOT IRREVERSIBLE, THE LEFT NOW HAS MORE THAN AN EVEN CHANCE OF COMING TO POWER IN FRANCE IN 1978, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE VALERY GISCARD D'ESTAING'S ADMINISTRATION WILL FAIL TO INITIATE NEW POLICY DEPARTURES TO INSTILL A SENSE OF RENEWED PURPOSE AND HOPE IN THE FRENCH BODY POLITIC. IF THE LEFT SUCCEEDS IN GAINING A PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY, CHABAN-DELMAS FORESEES SEVERE STRAINS ON THE FIFTH REPUBLIC'S INSTITUTIONS AND DRASTIC CONSEQUENCES FOR FRANCE'S INTERNAL STABILITY. END SUMMARY.

1.

DURING A CALL ON APRIL 8 JACQUES CHABAN-DELMAS,

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UDR DEPUTY AND MAYOR OF BORDEAUX, HE PROVIDED ME WITH THE

FOLLOWING POLITICAL ASSESSMENT:

2. THE PRESIDENTIAL MAJORITY HAS HAD TWO YEARS TO ELABORATE A PROGRAM WHICH WOULD INSTILL A SENSE OF CONFIDENCE AND HOPE IN THE FRENCH BODY POLITIC AND HAS FAILED TO DO SO. THE CANTONAL ELECTIONS IN MARCH ARE BUT A SYMBOL OF THIS FAILURE. THE LEFT, IN THE MEANTIME, HAS CAPITALIZED ON FRANCE'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND HAS SUCCEEDED IN PRESENTING ITSELF TO A GROWING MAJORITY OF VOTERS AS THE ONLY VIABLE HOPE AND ALTERNATIVE FOR FRANCE. A MAJOR CAUSE OF THIS LEFTIST ADVANCE IS THE LACK OF A COHESIVE STRATEGY AND "GRAND DESIGN" ON THE PART OF VALERY GISCARD D'ESTAING'S ADMINISTRATION. WHILE BOTH VGE AND PM CHIRAC HAVE EXCEPTIONAL QUALITIES AND ARE MASTER TECHNOCRATS, THEY LACK THE VISION NECESSARY TO LEAD FRANCE. MITTERRAND AND THE LEFT ARE MORE AND MORE FILLING THIS VACUUM. TWO YEARS HAVE ALREADY PAST SINCE THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND THE SUPPORT OF THE ELECTORATE IS IN SERIOUS DOUBT. IT IS ALSO HIGHLY DOUBTFUL THAT THE PRESIDENTIAL MAJORITY CAN MOBILIZE ITSELF INTO A POSITION WHICH CAN REVERSE THE LEFTIST TREND? THIS TREND IS NOT RPT NOT IRREVERSIBLE. HOWEVER, VGE AND CHIRAC WILL MOST PROBABLY SHY AWAY FROM BOLD NEW POLICY DEPARTURES IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND INTERNATIONAL FIELD. INSTEAD, AN INTENSIVE EFFORT WILL PROBABLY BE MADE TO PROMOTE ESTABLISHED POLICIES AND TO RAISE THE THREAT TO FRENCH SOCIETY OF THE COMMUNISTS COMING TO POWER. THIS WOULD BE BASICALLY A DEFENSIVE CAMPAIGN WHICH COULD EASILY LOSE CREDIBILITY OVER CERTAIN PERIOD OF TIME.

3. IN SHORT, THERE IS VERY LITTLE TIME LEFT TO REVERSE THE TREND. IT CAN BE DONE, BUT THE GOF HAS NOT DISPLAYED THE STATURE AND BREADTH OF VIEW TO CHANGE THE BASIC SITUATION. CONSEQUENTLY, THERE IS A SLIGHTLY MORE THAN EVEN CHANCE THAT IN THE 1978 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, THE LEFT WILL GAIN A MAJORITY AND ACCEDE TO A POSITION OF POLITICAL POWER IN FRANCE.

4. A LEFTIST PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY WOULD CREATE SEVERE
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STRAINS ON THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE FIFTH REPUBLIC AND ITS CONSTITUTION WHICH COULD NOT ACCOMODATE THE POLITICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN A MODERATE PRESIDENT AND A LEFTIST PARLIAMENT. AN INSTITUTIONAL CRISIS COULD LEAD TO, FOR EXAMPLE, THE RESIGNATION OF THE PRESIDENT. VGE MAY VERY WELL CHOOSE THIS ROUTE. HE IS NOT, IN THE LAST ANALYSIS, A FIGHTER BUT A MAN OF ACCOMODATION. THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE LEFT AND THE RIGHT IN FRANCE

WOULD BE EXACERBATED. FRANCE COULD EASILY ENTER A PERIOD OF BITTER POLEMIC LEADING TO DEMONSTRATIONS AND PUBLIC UNREST ON THE PART OF POLITICAL PARTIES, TRADE UNIONS, STUDENTS AND REGIONAL GROUPS. ONE CANNOT EXCLUDE THE WORST CASE HYPOTHESIS THAT FRANCE COULD WITNESS A VIRTUAL CIVIL WAR WITH THE MILITARY TEMPTED TO ENTER INTO POLITICS TO RESTORE ORDER. AT THAT POINT, ALL ONE COULD HOPE FOR IS THAT OUT OF THE CHAOS, FRANCE WOULD "REFIND ITSELF" AND THAT DEMOCRACY WOULD BE RESTORED UNDER STRONG AND ENLIGHTENED LEADERSHIP.

5. SOME LEADERS IN THE MAJORITY MAINTAIN A DANGEROUS BELIEF THAT ONCE IN POWER THE POLICY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FRENCH SOCIALISTS AND COMMUNISTS WOULD BECOME SO SERIOUS THAT THIS COALITION WOULD SPLIT UP LEADING TO A NEW POLITICAL SITUATION WHERE THE POSITION OF THE CENTER AND RIGHT WOULD BE ENHANCED. THIS IS POSSIBLE, BUT AGAIN, IT IS A DEFENSIVE AND PASSIVE ATTITUDE. ALSO, ONE SHOULD HAVE NO DOUBTS OVER THE PCF'S ABILITY, ONCE IN POWER, TO EXPLOIT THEIR SUPERIOR ORGANIZATIONAL BASE FROM THE FACTORY LEVEL TO THE NATIONAL POLITICAL LEVEL. THE PS WILL HAVE GREAT DIFFICULTY IN MODERATING THE INROADS OF THE PCF APPARAT INTO THE GOF STRUCTURE AND IT IS HIGHLY DOUBTFUL THAT THE PS WOULD BE ABLE TO CONTROL THE GROWTH OF INFLUENCE OF THE PCF.

COMMENT: CHABAN-DELMAS'S ASSESSMENT IS EVIDENTLY SOMBER. HE HAS NOT GIVEN UP ALL HOPE THAT THE LEFTIST TREND CAN BE REVERSED, BUT HE DOESN'T SEE VGE AND CHIRAC DOING WHAT IS NECESSARY TO STOP IT. CHABAN'S BASIC PREJUDICE IS THAT VGE AND CHIRAC ARE NOT "STATEMEN" AND THEREFORE ARE NOT EQUIPPED WITH THE IDEOLOGICAL BAGGAGE TO COUNTER THE FRENCH LEFT. OF COURSE, HE FEELS THAT THE POLICIES HE

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ENUNCIATED DURING THE 1974 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN CALLING FOR A "NEW SOCIETY" WOULD HAVE MOBILIZED FRENCH PUBLIC OPINION AND WOULD HAVE GIVEN FRANCE A SENSE OF PURPOSE. HE, HIMSELF, DEPLORES THE PRESENT POLITICAL TRENDS IN FRANCE. WHEN I REMARKED THAT HIS ASSESSMENT WAS PESSIMISTIC, HE COMMENTED THAT HE WAS NO PROPHET OF GLOOM; RATHER HE WAS DRAWING WHAT HE CONSIDERED WERE OBJECTIVES CONCLUSIONS THAT A FRENCH LEADER HAD TO FACE UP TO. IN THIS RESPECT, HE WILL PROBABLY URGE THE UDR TO GO BEYOND MERE LOYAL SUPPORT OF THE PRESIDENT AND PM AND PROPOSE POLICIES WHICH CAN HELP MOBILIZE PUBLIC OPINION AND SUPPORT FOR THE MODERATE FORCES IN FRANCE. DJEREJIAN

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